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The LAND of the ALPHABETS

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MOISHELACH, SHLOIMELACH AND THE BIRDS (SCENE III.)
 THE DEPARTURE FROM THE LAND OF THE ALEPH BES (SCENE VIII.)
 MALKAH'S DOLLS COME TO LIFE. (SCENE I.)

THE LAND OF THE ALEPH BES

A WONDER PLAY FOR JEWISH CHILDREN
In NINE SCENES

By SAMUEL S. GROSSMAN

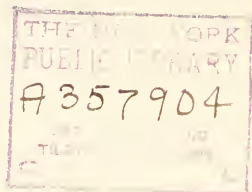
(Formerly Supervisor, Entertainment Department, Bureau
of Education, New York.)

Author of "The Purim Players," "What's To-night?"
"The Maccabees," "Mother of Martyrs," "Freedom," etc.

Illustrated

JULIUS H. GREENSTONE
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

1918



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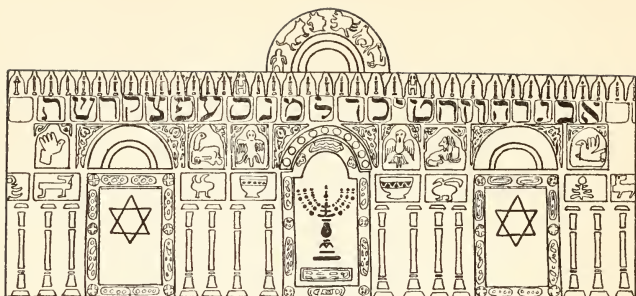
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CAST OF CHARACTERS OF "ALEPH BES LAND":

CHARACTERS IN SCENE ONE:

(MALKAH'S HOME)

MALKAH, a little Jewish girlie:

"I-DON'T-CARE", her boy-doll.

"ASK-A-LOT", her girl-doll.

THE REBBI	}	Sometimes called "Little Jewish Singing Man", "Little-Fellow-Find-a-Friend", "Moreh".
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"ALEPH"	}	The Rebbi's four servants in the Red Magic Book.
"BES"		
"SHIN"		
"TOPH".		

NEW CHARACTERS IN SCENE TWO:

(ALEPH BES LAND.)

"GIMEL".

"DALED".

"HEH".

"VOV".

"ZAYIN".

"CHES".

"TES".

"YODH".

"CHOPH".

"KOFF".

"FINAL CHOPH".

"LAMED".

"MEM".

"NUN".

"SAMACH".

"AYIN".

"PAY".

"TZADIK".

"KUF".

"RESH".

"AH" (Pasach)

"EH" (Chirik)

"OH" (Komatz)

"EH" (Segol)

All Soldiers of
the Gate.

Four Cousins

A GROUP OF RUSSIAN JEWISH CHILDREN

A GROUP OF MODERN PALESTINIAN CHILDREN

A GROUP OF DUTCH JEWISH CHILDREN

A GROUP OF AMERICAN JEWISH CHILDREN

NEW CHARACTERS IN SCENE THREE:

(THE LAND OF HAPPINESS.)

FOUR TREES.

FIVE "MOISHELACH" OR "SHLOIMELACH".

FOUR BIRDS.

TWO WINDS.

"TZIGELE", a little white pet-goat.

THE LETTERS THAT MAKE PICTURES.

JOSEPH—A REAL STORY.

THE LETTERS THAT MAKE SONGS.

NEW CHARACTERS IN SCENE FIVE:

(LOVELAND, WHERE JEWISH CHILDREN GROW.)

YANKELE, the wise little student. } Four little

CHONEH, the dreamer. } Russian

'ZEKIEL, very hungry } Jewish

SHOLOM, timid. } Boys.

YANKELE'S MOTHER.

CHONEH'S MOTHER.

'ZEKIEL'S MOTHER.

SHOLOM'S MOTHER.

NEW CHARACTERS IN SCENE SEVEN:

(THE LAND WHERE THE TREES PRAYED.)

NINE TREES.

BLACK BIRD.

BLUE BIRD.

WHITE BIRD.

SCENE I.—THE HOME OF MALKAH.

CHARACTERS:

MALKAH	ALEPH.
"ASK-A-LOT"	BES.
"I-DON'T-CARE"	SHIN.
THE REBBI.	TOPH.

As soon as the front curtain parts you can see Malkah's room.

Two chairs stand forward and on one is "I Don't Care" in a blue sailor-suit, while on the other is "Ask-a-Lot" all dressed up. Malkah is on the floor before the chair, resting her arm on the doll's shoulder.

It looks like "an evening with mother" and Malkah is telling them a story as if they were live children.

MALKAH.

Once upon a time there was a Rebbi and he had a lot—a lot of Kinderlach! A lot—a lot of Kinderlach! (*To her girl-doll.*) "Ask-a-Lot", Kinderlach mean children—And once the Rebbi went away and he locked up the house, and all the Kinderlach were inside. And a big bear came and he knocked at the door. (*Imitates bear, in gruff voice.*) "Let me in Kinderlach; let me in Kinderlach." But the children all kept quiet and wouldn't let the bear in. Don't get frightened, Ask-a-Lot. And just as the bear started to break the door in, what do you think happened? The window opened up and all the children flew out, and flew far, far away, where the bear couldn't catch them. And just then the

Rebbi came back and the bear ran away. And nobody knows where the Kinderlach are, except the Rebbi. (*Pause, then as though answering a question.*) And nobody knows where the Rebbi is, either. Don't you wish you knew where they are? (*To the boy-doll.*) O, you don't care! (*Sternly to the girl-doll.*) Don't ask so many questions! (*Goes to the window.*) Maybe they're over the hills! (*Thoughtfully.*) The moon knows, maybe. (*Looks out, fascinated.*) The moon is calling us! It's saying, "Come on, children, far away!" Hear it singing, too! "Little Jewish Children, come, follow the moon. Come! Over the hills is magic land and happy land and Jewish Wonderland! Where the old Rebbi is." (*Pause, turns disappointedly to dolls*) You're only dolls—and—I thought—you—were—real children. (*She sinks down by the dolly's chair and slowly falls asleep.*)

(*A soft singing voice is heard in the distance. The music it utters is the beautiful "Haas Hashe-mesh," and a fiddle accompanies the voice. As it comes nearer, Malkah listens entranced, marking time unconsciously. Then the first verse of the song is ended and a knock is heard at the door.*)

MALKAH (*joyfully*).

Children! It's the moon's man maybe! (*Slowly,*)—or the bear maybe! Hush! Children, be still in your places, and don't breathe a word. I'll never tell him you're here!

(*Malkah cautiously steps forward and closes the curtains completely in front of the dolls, so that*

you can't see them at all. Then, standing still, she says, in a breathless whisper.) "Who's it?—Who's it?"

(The melody begins again; she smiles and cries gladly.) Come in! (To herself, in ecstasy.) Perhaps it's the Rebbi.

(Now you hear a door opening outside and in skips the little Jewish-Singing-Man from far away. He has twinkling eyes and a dark beard; wears a very, very funny long yellow cloak with a patch near the shoulder. He does not walk but he skips, at the same time playing on his little fiddle and singing.)

MALKAH.

(Delighted as he comes to her.)

From where are you?

LITTLE MAN.

From everywhere over the wide world.

MALKAH.

Please, what is your name?

LITTLE MAN.

Some call me the Rebbi, and some call me "The Jewish-Singing-Man from far away." Did you hear my music? *(He starts to play again.)*

MALKAH.

It is beautiful. O sing again and play, *please!*

LITTLE MAN.

Don't ask me! I warn you, if you listen to me very long, you'll want to skip after me; you'll want to fly far away with me!

MALKAH.

Would you take me? Where will you go?

LITTLE MAN.

To the lands of all my kinderlach. To every place where there are Jewish children, where there are Jewish songs!

MALKAH.

Is that where you came from?

LITTLE MAN.

Yes!

MALKAH.

And do you know many Jewish children?

(He starts to play a phrase from "Auf'n Pripichek" before he answers.)

LITTLE MAN.

(After playing the first two lines.) Many, many hundreds and thousands of Jewish children!

MALKAH.

All the same?

LITTLE MAN.

No! Some little Jewish children are in Russia-land and some are in Prussialand, and some are in Chinaland—

MALKAH

(Delighted, claps hands).

Everywhere? Even in Chinaland?

LITTLE MAN.

Yes! Over the hills are Jewish children and over the valley, and over the moon, too.

MALKAH.

They must be lonely,—I think,—so far away!

LITTLE MAN.

Yes. Some are very lonely. I am the friend of those. I go all over the world with my little fiddle and my little songs, and I hear what all the little Jewish girls and boys say and what they think.—

MALKAH.

And even what they dream—?

LITTLE MAN.

Yes! and when some little Jewish girls are lonely I come and play and sing. (*Slowly*) But most important of all is the introducing to my servants, I mean....

MALKAH.

What—what's that?

LITTLE MAN.

If you want to find out you must come to the land where my little ones live. Listen! (*Music of "Auf'n Pripichek" played and hummed.*) That's the song of a million Jewish Children in Aleph Bes Land.

MALKAH.

A million!—Are there that many in the whole world?

LITTLE MAN (*quickly*).

More! Do you want to come along with me? I'll take you if you'll come. Do you want to see some Jewish children that I know? Do you want

to hear all these wonderful lonesome tunes, and happy tunes that Jewish children sing?—Do you?—Do you want to see the whole world?—and far away?—and the sky?—and over the moon? And Jewish children's Aleph Bes Land?—

MALKAH (*rushing to him*).

Take me, little Mister Jewish Singing Man. Take me to see all these other Jewish boys and girls—the million! And Aleph Bes Land!

LITTLE MAN

(*Starting, and taking her hand*).

Then we'll sail away in my Red Magic Book!

MALKAH

(*Starts eagerly and then suddenly stops*).

Wait!—I'm terribly sorry,—I can't go,—(*She peeks inside the curtains which hide the dolls.*)

LITTLE MAN.

Why, what's the matter?

MALKAH

(*Almost heart-broken*).

I can't leave my friends, here—

LITTLE MAN (*cheerfully*).

I'll take them with us!

MALKAH (*sobs*).

No, you can't.—They're not grown-up like I am—and they have no Jewish names—and they're—the only—friends— I have!

LITTLE MAN

(Putting his arm about her, soothingly).

I'll get you others. I can do many things. I can get every little Jewish child friends. My other name is "Little-Fellow-Find-a-Friend."

MALKAH.

O! But I can't leave them behind!

LITTLE MAN.

The Dolls? You must come quick. *(He rushes to the window)* Quick! The moon is coming out big. We won't be able to jump over it if it grows any bigger.

MALKAH.

I won't desert my friends, even if they *are* dolls! *(She turns toward the curtain.. A sob. Then—)* They're *Jewish* dolls, too—because I made them so—

LITTLE MAN *(suddenly)*.

Why didn't you say that before? I know what we'll do! We'll make them live; like real children.

MALKAH *(amazed)*.

Can you do that!

LITTLE MAN

(Putting his fiddle under his chin again).

With my little fiddle and song I can!

MALKAH.

Do it! *(She is quivering with anticipation; then suddenly stops short; sadly.)* O! They'll be so small they'll tumble over the moon when they fly.

LITTLE MAN.

I'll just make them grow up! Grow up just like you! And they'll come with us. Shall I?

MALKAH.

Yes! Yes! (*They stand in front of the closed curtains. Malkah peeks through, and cries gladly.*) It's not the bear, children, it's the Rebbi! (*Then she brings the curtains together again.*) (*He plays "M'nagnim."* She speaks quickly, as he plays, and clutches his cloak in nervous excitement.)

MALKAH

(*Agitated; speaks excitedly.*)

The little blue-suit one is a boy-doll! I call him "I-Don't-Care." And the other one is a girl-doll, with a pink sash, and a white dress! She's "Ask-a-Lot." That's what I call her! O—play harder! How big will they be? Will "Ask-a-Lot" ask a lot of questions if she talks, like I imagined? Will the boy-doll say "I-Don't-Care" like I make believe he will? Oh! are you ready? Are they real?—Are they grown up?—Shall I look?—Shall I open the curtain?

LITTLE MAN

(*He comes to the proper point of his music.*)
Now!

MALKAH.

(*Rushes to the curtain and tears it open. There in place of the two dolls are the real live children, complete copies of the two dolls in costume, face paint, bodily appearance, and sitting in the same position on the chair.*)

Momentary pause, while the living dolls mechanically rise. Malkah flings herself at them and embraces them.)

So, "Ask-a-Lot!" You're real, like me!—"I-Don't-Care," you're a boy instead of a doll! He'll take you with me!—O, I'm so happy!

I-DON'T-CARE (Boy Doll)

(Pushing Malkah away; contemptuously).

Ah, *I don't care* to be kissed by a girl!

MALKAH *(to Little Man).*

Now!—Now!—Take us! Take us!—See they are real Jewish children.

ASK-A-LOT (Girl-Doll).

(Slowly with a drawling, questioning voice, and mechanical stare).

Is it far from here?—How do we go there? Do you know how to get there? Is the bear there? Will the moon stop us?—Is it hard to go there?—What do the children look like?—Do you know them to speak to?—Will you introduce me?

MALKAH

(Delighted at the reality of her doll-characters).

Ask a lot! Ask a lot!

LITTLE MAN

(Staggered by Ask-a-Lot's profuse questions).

Yes—and—no!—and—yes—and—no! Wait! I'll answer all your questions with my Magic Book!

MALKAH (*excited*).

He's got a magic book! The rebbi's got a Magic Book!

BOY-DOLL

(*With disdainful gaze*).

I don't care!—

LITTLE MAN

(*Making funny motions, but speaking with the gravity of a wizard*).

Aleph, Bes, Toph, Shin
Hurry, bring my Red Book in!
Aleph, Toph, Shin, Bes,
Bring my book right to this place,
Aleph, Toph, I want to look,
Shin, Bes, bring my book!

(*Two halves, each a cover of Red Book which is used as an alphabet primer, enlarged to the size of about five feet high, fly in from opposite sides and join into an open book in the center of the stage, in front of the little man.*)

LITTLE MAN.

My little magic book! You're just in time.
(*Stands in front of it and questions solemnly*)
Where are my Kinderlach?

GIRL-DOLL (*aside to Boy-Doll*).

Why does he call them Kinderlach?

VOICE IN BOOK (*answers the Rebbi*).

Far away!

LITTLE MAN.

Where are they?

VOICE IN BOOK.

Further than the middle of the Sea.

GIRL-DOLL

(Aside, with insistent questioning tone).

O! Are they drowned?

VOICE IN BOOK.

No, they are living.

MALKAH

(Advances timidly to the book).

Where do little Jewish Children live?

VOICE IN BOOK.

In Aleph Bes Land.

GIRL-DOLL.

Where is that?

VOICE IN BOOK.

It is a little place far from everywhere and near to anywhere.

MALKAH.

Magic Book, magic book, tell me how to get there?

VOICE IN BOOK.

Ask my master! Ask my master!

LITTLE MAN

(Bowing gravely; quotes the directions with serious air).

Go from Russialand and go from Spanishland

and go from Prussialand, and go from Danishland, and go from Englishland, and go where they meet in the middle of the earth under the sea, above land, everywhere, that's the place called Aleph Bes Land!

MALKAH.

Red Book, Hebrew Book, tell me, will the Kinderlach be glad to see us if we come?

VOICE IN BOOK.

They are very glad when anybody comes. And they have wonderful stories to tell.

MALKAH.

Are all the Jewish Kinderlach of the world there? —In Aleph Bes Land?

VOICE IN BOOK.

No, some are still dreaming in the air, looking for the other Kinderlach.

GIRL-DOLL.

Who shows them the way?

VOICE IN BOOK.

Ask my master, ask my master.

LITTLE MAN.

I show all the Kinderlach the way to Aleph Bes Land, when I find them dreaming in the air.

MALKAH.

Who will take me to Aleph Bes Land, little Red Book, little Magic Book?

VOICE IN BOOK.

Ask my master, ask my master.

LITTLE MAN.

I will take you to the most beautiful place in the world. To Aleph Bes Land—to the Jewish Land of Dreams and Wonders.

GIRL-DOLL.

Who will carry me to Aleph Bes Land?

(Voices suddenly start murmuring and quarreling within the Book.)

VOICES ONE AND TWO.

I will carry you there! I! I!

VOICES THREE AND FOUR.

No, I! No, I! Let me! Let me out! I will!—me!

(The two halves of the magic book come apart and there scramble out—Aleph, Bes, Shin, Toph, all of them impersonated by real children. They are now pushing each other and fighting. They all try to get Little Man's attention.)

ALEPH (*excitedly*).

No, I! No, I! I'm first, I'm Aleph—always first! Aa! Aa!

BES (*same excitement*).

No, I'm better! Bb! Bb! Bb!

SHIN (*same*).

I'm surer! Sh! Sh!

TOPH (*same*).

I! I! I'm truer, truer! I'm Toph!

BES.

I'm the best boat to go in. I'm Bes! (*Makes a drawn out sound.*) B-B-Boat!

SHIN (*crowding in his place*).

Sh! Sh! Sh! Fly with me!

ALEPH (*waving his arm, proudly*).

Aleph! Aleph! Take Aleph! Look at Aleph's arm!

TOPH.

Me! Me! I'm Toph! Take me!

(*The four letters crowd around the dolls and Malkah, trying each to show off before them.*)

LITTLE MAN.

(*On the other side of the stage, draws a quick shrill note on his fiddle; then sternly*)

Aleph! Bes! Shin! Toph!

(*They rush to him penitently.*)

MALKAH AND GIRL-DOLL (*together*).

Goodness! Who are they?

BOY-DOLL

(*Who has been standing stupidly, and leering at all the action.*)

I don't care!

LITTLE MAN

(As they cuddle near him).

They're my little servants—Aleph, Bes, Shin, Toph, I tell you stop it! What do you mean by falling out! Get right back into your line into the book and stay printed! Every single letter of you!

TOPH *(very fat, and meek).*

Please let me go first! Aleph is always your pet, but you make me go last. I want to go first to Aleph Bes Land!

LITTLE MAN.

How can I mix you up? We'll be lost forever. Ready! In line!

(They get in proper order—Aleph, Bes, Shin, Toph. He reviews them.)

Aleph, your place?

ALEPH *(soldier like).*

At the top of the line, Adoni.

LITTLE MAN *(commanding).*

Go back and steer the Book-Boat for us, Bes!

BES.

I'm next to Aleph, Adoni.

SHIN *(stepping up).*

I'm next to the end.

TOPH *(weeping).*

At the end!

LITTLE MAN (*petting Toph*).

You'll keep our boat from sinking. Get the boat ready to take these children!

(*They rush into the book and the halves close. A humming of "Y'lodim Tsu" begins inside the book. Little Man seizes his fiddle and starts to play it and sing it also.*)

Come on, to Jewish Children's Aleph Bes Land, children!

(*He plays "Y'lodim Tsu" merrily as they come into "The Boat."*)

Little girl, whatever you do, don't get my servants mixed. If you should call the little fat one "Aleph," my, he'd start to steer! And we would tumble upside down into the sky instead of going into the middle of the bottom of the sea — All ready?—

ALL.

Ready! Ready!

LITTLE MAN.

Climb in! All aboard the Red Ark for Aleph Bes Land to see the Kinderlach!

ALL

(*Shout, as he plays "Y'lodim Tsu"*).

All aboard!—All aboard! Good-bye everybody! Good-bye everybody! We're off for Aleph Bes Land! Aleph Bes Land!

(*The stage grows darker. "The Boat" begins to disappear. Then voices are heard, as if from the air where the Boat is flying. The stage is empty.*)

MALKAH'S VOICE (*in the air, off-stage*).

See! We are near the moon. Faster! Faster!
O, there's my father down on the earth, saying the
prayer before the new moon! Faster! Faster!
Aleph, Toph!—I mean Aleph! O! O!

SHOUTS.

(*Of all the voices in the boat, in alarm*).

Look out! O! We're upset! I don't care! Where
are we? The moon! Over the moon! O! O!

(*Screams and then silence. Darkness. Change of
scene.*)

SCENE II.

IN FRONT OF THE GATES OF THE LAND OF
THE ALEPH BES.

CHARACTERS:

ALL THE LETTERS.	"OH".
THE REBBI.	MALKAH.
"EEH".	
"EH".	CHILDREN FROM EUROPE.
"AH".	CHILDREN FROM PALESTINE.
	CHILDREN FROM AMERICA.

This scene is represented by a curtain placed well towards the front of the stage, so that there is enough of stage depth for a scene to be set behind this curtain.

Here we have a design of the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet running across the top, like a valence, or "border."

The Curtain itself represents a stone wall set against a land of purple hills.

The wall has three gateways, one on each side and one in the middle. The gates placed into these spaces are rectangular in shape—and see! They look like gigantic covers of Hebrew Books; later, when they swing open, it is as if a book were opening instead of a gate.

The gate-cover at the right, in addition to vague Hebrew lettering, has imprinted on it an enlarged "Aleph," the middle one a "Bes" and the left, a "Gimel."

The scene begins in a dim light; when the light grows a little stronger you can see the Aleph Bes Brigade that guards the Land at the gates.

The letters of the Aleph Bes are lined up from Gimel to Resh—each letter a living character in white, with his “picture” printed very large and clear on the front of his flat little body—the printed letter reaching from neck to knees in the regular letters, and running down to the ankles on “final Choph.” “final Feh.,” etc.

At first, the Aleph Bes Brigade stands flat and still against the wall—like an inanimate line in the page of a book.

Gradually they appear to be coming to life—then the line marches forward, towards the footlights. The song begins, and as the Brigade sings, a “drill” of words is executed by the letters who run together in groups like “words,” then form other “words,” etc.

(SONG OF THE GUARDS OF THE GATE.)

Hush! Hush!

Hush! Hush!

Lo! the Kinderlach sleep and forget;
Come ye letters of the Alphabet!

(Now sung and drilled in the manner of a roll-call, each letter stepping forward and announcing himself.)

Peh! Heh!

Ches! Tes!

Gimel! Daled! Lamed! Zayin! Ayin.

Wake from your sleep in your books' closed cover
And come to your land, till the night is over.

REFRAIN.

O, we are the guards of Aleph Bes Land,
The Rebbi is the gener-al—attend to his command!

(Drilling in front of the three respective gates.)

At the gate of Love,
At the gate of Joy,
At the gate of Help,
For girl and boy!

Guard the gates! The line of letters stand,
And wait to hear the general's command.
Ho! Guards of the gate of Aleph Bes Land!

(When the song is ended the line returns to its first position against the wall.)

YODH

(Steps forward as drill master).

Letters, in line! *(They form a straight line.)*
I will call the roll. Aleph! *(Pause. Silence.)* Bes!
(Same.) Where are Aleph? Bes?

Vov

(Steps forward, salutes).

They left in the great Red Ark.

GIMEL.

With Toph and Shin and the Rebbi.

NUN.

They have not returned.

(A sound of tumbling masses is heard off stage.)

YODH *(listening intently).*

Our Master and our brothers and the Red Ark—
coming!

(The line breaks and all rush to the side to look off.)

TOPH

(Alone, very much frightened and upset, enters, sobbing).

It wasn't my fault! Malkah, the little girl she—told me to—steer—and—and—

(Commotion among the letters. "What's happened!" They break ranks and form around Toph.)

TOPH *(explosively; sobbing).*

It was Aleph's fault. The Red Book tumbled upside down and we all tumbled out—all over Aleph Bes Land!

ALL.

What!

TOPH *(weeping bitterly).*

And I don't know where the Aleph fell and I don't know where Bes, or Shin are; and I don't know where Malkah fell, or the Boy-doll or the Girl-doll....

ALL.

What does he mean? What is it?

TOPH.

And the Rebbi—the Rebbi is lost too!

ALL.

What! Where?

TOPH.

In the air! Over the biggest book! Somewhere over the moon, I'm afraid!

ALL (*in consternation*).

The Rebbi's lost! O! (*Excited, loud groups form.*)

CHES (*steps forward*).

Sh!

(*Slowly and with dark meaning invites the other letters around him.*)

If the Rebbi doesn't come back—we'll rule over all of Aleph Bes Land! And not one child will we admit into it again from anywhere in the world!

ALL (*looking into the audience*).

See our four cousins, the Vowels, are coming!
(*Suddenly from the back of the audience's seats there appear Four Vowels, Ee, Eh, Ah, and Oh. They rush up the aisles and up to the stage, one after the other and each in turn falls at the feet of the "Yodh," thus making a letter-with-vowel appearance. Ee comes up first.*)

YODH.

Where do you come from, "Ee"?

EE.

I come from the East. Jewish Children are coming from the East to see the Land of the Aleph Bes. They want to go thru the gate of Joy.

(*Points to Gate Aleph. Ee kneels to another letter and Eh rushes up on the stage.*)

YODH.

"Eh" why do you shake so?

EH.

I come from the West. Jewish Children are coming from the West of the world to see Aleph Bes Land. They want the gates of Love opened for them.

(Points to Gate Bes.)

(Ah rushes up. Same stage action.)

YODH.

"Ah" where are you from?

AH.

I come from the South. Jewish children from the Southland are coming to see Aleph Bes Land. They want to pass thru Help Street, I have come to kneel at your feet. I beg you to let them in. *(Murmurs of "No" "No" among the soldier letters.)* ("Oh" rushes up.)

YODH.

"Oh!"

OH.

I come from the Northland. Jewish children want to come to Aleph Bes Land and see all the beautiful things behind the gates. Please let them in.

(Murmurs of decided "No.")

CHES (*darkly*).

Hear me brothers! These Jewish children have never learned their Alphabet in Hebrew. They don't know us at all. *Me* they don't even recognize. Let's take revenge and not let them into our Jewish Wonderland.

(Shouts of "Good!" "Good!")

DALED.

I don't care if every picture of me in the Hebrew books burns to ashes!

TES.

I'm tired of Jewish children anyhow. I'm red and blue being written in their copybooks.

KUF.

Here I stay, I don't go back to Cheder for the rest of my life!

SEVERAL.

No more Cheder! No more Cheder! Stay here!

CHOPH.

As hard as I've tried to make Jewish children learn my name—O, what's the use?

SEVERAL (*Shout*).

We'll never go back to Cheder! Never!

LAMED.

I don't care! Everybody stay away from Hebrew School!

MEM.

Stay here! Be awake all day and all night!

HEH.

No more sleeping in old books!

ZAYIN.

Jewish children are tyrants. Keep us closed up in pages on shelves forever!

KOFF.

I've been trying to teach Jewish children for several thousand years and they still don't know me from my twin brother.

LOUD SHOUTS.

"No more Cheder!" "No more Cheder!" "Stay here!" "Forever!" "Burn the books!" etc.

YODH (*stepping forward*).

You talk as if you were not Hebrew Letters at all. Be ashamed of yourself! Every Jewish child knows *me* and can write *me* when it's three years old. It's not Jewish children's fault that Ches makes himself so hard.

CHES

(*Rushes at Yodh angrily, hisses*).

Ch! Ch! Ch! I'll throw you out of the book!
(*Commotion among the letters.*)

YODH (*wards Ches off*).

And what will the Rebbi say when he returns to Aleph Bes Land?

CHES.

Ch! Ch! I believe the Rebbi is lost forever! He left Aleph Bes Land, and he will never come back. Didn't you hear what Toph just said. Hoorah! The Rebbi will never make us stand in line again, or tell us what to do and what not to do! *I* say take all this Aleph Bes Land for ourselves and turn it upside down, and do everything the Rebbi said not to do! Make *me* the first letter of the alphabet.

ALL.

Hooray!

A FEW LETTERS

(Looking into the audience).

Children are coming to Aleph Bes Land!

OH *(pleading)*.

Jewish children from the Northland!

AH *(same)*.

Jewish children from the Southland.

EE *(same)*.

Jewish children from the Eastland.

EH *(same)*.

Jewish children from the Westland.

CHES

(Pushing them all against the wall).

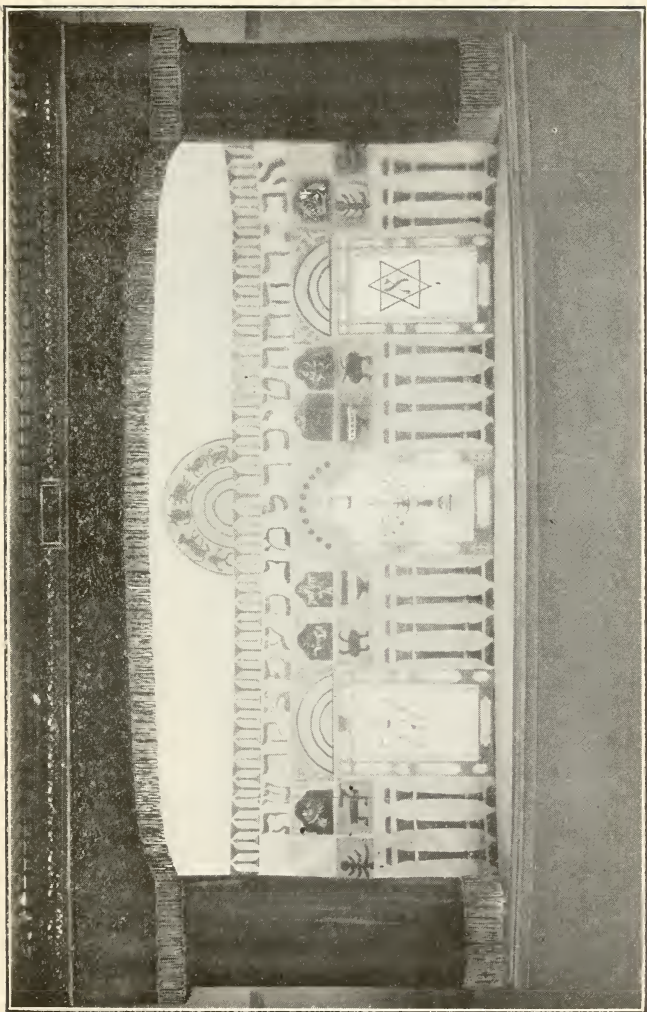
In line, I tell you, and pretend you're only printed, not alive! The children must not get in!

(The letters stand "dead" against the walls, barring the gate.

Four groups of tiny children come up from the audience.

One is composed of Russian Jewish children huddling with their mothers, as though afraid, and weeping. The other group is a set of American kiddies, the third are modern Palestinian boys, and the fourth are cute Dutch children.

They come up the stage in their respective atti-



IN FRONT OF THE GATES OF ALEPH BES LAND (SCENE II.)
(SETTING BY WM. ZORACH)

tudes. Then they go about examining everything wonderingly, and exclaiming, "Aleph Bes Land! Wonderland! Here it is!"

They touch the inanimate Hebrew Letters and try to peer into the barred gates.

The Russian Jewish kiddies alone remain near their mothers, apart from the rest, and sobbing.)

CHES

(Suddenly steps forward).

Go away all you children! We won't let you into Aleph Bes Land anymore—not even in your dreams! You shall be stupid for the rest of your lives!

(All the children, frightened, make for the steps, shouting in fear; the Rebbi's fiddle is heard and all are instantly frozen in their places. As the melody of "Auf'n Pripichek" comes nearer the Letters become rigid and the children, lured by the music, press on slowly and silently toward the stage entrance whence the music comes. All seem happy in this pantomime group except the Russian Jewish children.)

THE REBBI (*enters*).

Dear Jewish children from all over the world! Have no fear!

(He turns reproachfully to the Letters; at his coming they quake and shake fearfully. They stand shamefacedly before the Rebbi on one side of the stage while the groups of children stand on the other side, with eager hopeful faces.

Pause.

The Rebbi, in the center of the stage, turns first to the letters.)

REBBI.

Ches!

(Ches steps forward trembling.)

I know who hoped I would never come back. You, Ches, who have everything in the world—two strong legs and a fine head!

(Ches begins to sniffle, several other of the rebellious letters also put their hands to their eyes.)

Come, come, don't cry! That's what makes you seem rubbed out in a book. Stand up, in a straight line.

(They brace up with an effort.)

You shall be punished—but not now. I have very important things to do. I have guests to welcome!

ALL THE CHILDREN

(Shouting with glee).

"The Rebbi!" "The Rebbi!" "The Rebbi will let us in!"

THE REBBI

(Sternly to the Letters).

Let three of you go to find the little girl and the boy doll and the girl doll. Even if they do not recognize you, bring them here by the magic of my songs.

(Vov, Nun and Gimel go out. The Rebbi turns to explain to the Kinderlach.)

I went to bring another little girl and her friends here—but *(sadly)* I have lost her, for I could not teach her to recognize the Letters, and she made

such a blunder! But you may go into Aleph Bes Land, and see its wonder-places now!

(A commotion of protest among the Letters.)

VOICES AMONG THE LETTERS.

"They don't know me!" "Nor me!" "I vote against them!" "I'll fight to the last!" etc.

VOICES AMONG THE CHILDREN.

"We do!" "I can read a Bible!" "I know every letter!"

LETTERS.

"Come on, prove it!" "Show us!" "You can't get in!"

(The stage is filled with heated arguments; the groups of children shout their ability as readers and knowers of the letters, and the latter challenge the claims, at the same time standing firm against the gates to bar all the children. Both groups shout to the Rebbi to decide for them.)

REBBI

(Goodnaturedly makes himself heard; the din dies down while he speaks).

My kinderlach! My letters! Fight it out for yourselves. This is my decision! Any letter that stands before a gate and cannot be recognized may stand there and defend the gate until one of the Kinderlach can name him. But, whoever of the Kinderlach names a letter can go thru the gate. Ready!

(A loud din and the game commences.

The letters jump in front of the gates time and time again, only to be named triumphantly by a child, who quickly passes thru; it is like a "tag" game.

The letters are losing steadily. Nearly all the children, shouting with glee, have passed thru one gate or another.

Then the letters combine in front of the gates—still the kinderlach win!

Finally one girl is left alone. She is a little bewildered and Heh and Ches, thinking to take advantage of her, quickly change places at the gates, as in a game of "tag-bases" and the little girl fails, because she calls Heh, "Ches."

All the letters laugh mischievously. The girl starts to cry, catches herself quickly, cries "Heh"—and passes thru.

The stage is now clear of the children. They are heard on the other side of the curtain for awhile; evidently they are very happy there.

The Letters, greatly disappointed at their defeat take sullen attitudes near the gates.

The Rebbi puts fiddle to chin and begins the melody of "Haas Hashemesh," in which all the children back stage help.

Enter Malkah, with Aleph and Gimel. She is despondent. The letters stand still and "dead" against the wall.)

MALKAH

(Seeing the Rebbi, rushes towards him).

O Rebbi! Rebbi! Ask-a-lot and I-don't-care are lost! (sobs.) O—Rebbi—please—find them—

REBBI (*gladly*).

Malkah! my letters have found you! They will find the others, too! Aleph, for your loyalty in tumbling after her you shall be the first letter of the Alphabet forever. (*Aleph bows and goes in front of Gate Aleph.*) And you (*to the letter Gimel who accompanies her*) some day I shall fix your broken foot for you! (*Gimel limps joyfully to position in front of Gate Gimel.*)

MALKAH

(*Profusely apologetic and still sobbing*).

O Rebbi! Forgive me for steering the boat wrong. I upset it, and now my dolls are lost!

REBBI.

Don't weep little Malkah. My brave little letters will find them and bring them to this gate just as they found you. You are unhappy. Shall I take you to the land of Joy, where Jewish children laugh and play?

MALKAH (*eagerly*).

Rebbi—is there really a land of Joy for Jewish Kinderlach?

REBBI (*musings*).

The joy of little Jewish children is in little letters—mysterious letters (*points to the background*) that mean now one thing, now another.

(*Very silently the letters are drilling at the back of the stage into new formations. Malkah looks but cannot understand.*)

Ask them what they know—they can tell you so

many things! Sometimes the letters come together among themselves so (*pointing to a stand in the drill*) and they are a happy story. Or so—(*the letters have drilled into new “words”*) and you will shed tears listening to them.

MALKAH

(*Dazed, evidently not seeing the letters*).

But I don't know them—I can't see—I don't understand—

REBBI (*amused*).

Ah—you must know where the letters hide or you will never find them. You must search them out of the pages of their books like flowers in tall grass. (*Confidentially*) My letters sleep in books and pretend they cannot speak at all. But if you discover them in their pages, and call their names aloud—fast!—and several together—they are glad to be awakened—and then!—they will tell you stories—they will sing songs with you—they will play games with you! In the Land of Story and Game and Song!

MALKAH.

I want to see the land behind those gates. I want to see the joy-places in Aleph Bes Land! Teach me, Rebbi, and let me know the letters!

REBBI.

Here they stand, guarding the gates! Do you know him now? (*Pointing to Aleph, who stands in front of gate Aleph.*)

MALKAH.

O that's Aleph. That's the one that helped me!

REBBI.

He guards the first gate of childhood—of the very littlest Kinderlach. That is the gate that leads to the land of Play and Joy!

MALKAH

(Pointing to Gate Bes and Gimel and to the other letters).

What are those gates and those letters?

REBBI.

Those are other places in Aleph Bes Land. *(Wistfully.)* Don't ask the names of the rest of the letters—better you should not know—for a Jewish child plays when it knows only Aleph—if it knows more it stops playing! Ask Aleph to let you in.

MALKAH.

Aleph—Aleph! Let me in to see the joy of Jewish children!

ALEPH

(Slowly and ceremoniously opens the gate, shouts to the region beyond).

Prepare the joy of Jewish children. Malkah is coming!

(Malkah goes up to the gate, but remains there, waiting for the Rabbi.)

THE REBBI *(to the Letters).*

Let no Letter of all my land sleep either at night or at daybreak till the other two children are found. *(A murmur of discontent among the Letters.)* Be

silent, Letters. (*The Letters stand still. Rabbi looks at their pitiful situation, and relents.*) No, I will not punish you now. You may go off and make new songs for children to sing tomorrow.

(*A happy noise, letters fall into small groups, hum gladly.*)

Only come when I call you!

(*Singing joyfully, the letters scatter off and fly away on all sides like a flock of birds released from imprisonment.*)

The Rabbi alone remains, smiling after them, then he turns and notices Malkah waiting patiently at the gate of Joy. He takes up his fiddle and starts to play "Kum Tzu Mir in Cheder'll."—Malkah, fascinated, advances to him and takes his arm.)

THE REBBI (*guiding Malkah*).

Come to the land of the Kinderlach's song and story and play!

(*Sounds of joy off-stage. The Rabbi leads Malkah and together they go thru the gate Aleph to the Land of Joy.*)

(*Darkness—Change of scene.*)

SCENE III.

"PLAYLAND IN ALEPH BES LAND."

CHARACTERS:

FOUR TREES.

"TZIGELE," *a white pet goat.*

JOSEPH, *a real story.*

FOUR MOISHELACH OR SHLOIMELACH (*Russian Kinderlach*).

THE LETTERS THAT MAKE PICTURES.

TWO WINDS.

THE LETTERS THAT MAKE SONGS.

THE DUTCH JEWISH KIDDIES.

THE PALESTINE CHILDREN.

OTHER GROUPS OF JEWISH CHILDREN FROM AMERICA, EUROPE—ALL OF KINDERGARTEN AGE.

REBBI.

MALKAH.

(The Woods of Springtime, late on a bright afternoon.

In the background and at the sides are trees, and flowers beginning to bloom.

All over this happy woods are groups of children. If we had not seen them before we would think there are a million of them here. But we know they are only the tiny Dutch and American and Palestinian Jewish children we saw entering the gates.

Here they are, sprawling on the ground in the oddest groups. They are looking towards the center of the stage, as if a "make-believe" were

going on there, and how they are enjoying themselves!)

GLAD VOICES OF ALL GROUPS.

"Once more!" "Please do it again!" "O!" "I wish I could do that!" "Wait till I'm big!" "Do it again!" "There!" "There!" "Did you see!"

(In the center of this ring, where all the delighted kiddies are so eagerly watching, is "Tzigele," a pure white pet goat, turning somersaults and doing tumble-sets.)

VOICES SHOUTING.

"O, Tzigele, Tzigele!" "Do it again, Tzigele!" "I wonder if my father would let me have such pet." "Isn't Tzigele beautiful?" "Again!"

(Tzigele turns another tumble-set to please everybody, then stands up on two feet and looks around.)

TZIGELE

(Really impersonated by a child, but speaks and acts like a pet goat).

Meh—Meh—Meh! Kinderlach, Kinderlach, you are all behaving exactly as your fathers and mothers used to do.

ALL (*Shout*).

Tzigele! Tzigele! Hooray! Hooray for Tzigele!

TZIGELE

(Observes a very little Shloimelah sitting, alone in a corner, frisks up to him).

Shloimelah, want a ride?

SHLOIMELAH

(Timidly gets on Tzigele's back and gets a bumpy ride across the stage—while Tzigeleh puffs and cries Meh—Meh! The little one laughs in spite of himself and all shout with glee).

TZIGELE.

Kinderlach, Kinderlach, what else shall I do?

ONE CHILD.

Bring us raisins!

ANOTHER CHILD.

Bring us almonds!

A THIRD CHILD.

Raisins and almonds!

SEVERAL (*quickly*).

Raisins! Almonds!

TZIGELE.

(Nods his head from one to the other).

You say raisins? Me-eh! You say almonds? Just like your fathers and mothers used to ask! Meeh! Good! Meh-Meh! Meh-Meh!

(He runs off.)

(All the children laugh, break up the groups that sat still, and form new lively laughing groups.)

THE REBBI

(Enters with Malkah and comes to the front of the stage, to the right. None of the other children notices the newcomers. They simply continue

playing in groups; several are trying to imitate Tzigele's tumblesets, but alas! how it hurts when you turn over wrong).

MALKAH.

O Rebbi! This is the Tzigele my mother said was under my bed when I was in the cradle!

THE REBBI.

(Stands in a corner; speaks to Malkah).

Yes. Let me stand here, while you go and play.

MALKAH *(surprised)*.

But I want you to play, too!

THE REBBI.

I am too grown up. I don't belong.

MALKAH.

Who does?

THE REBBI.

Children who can't pronounce very well—winds that are sunny and new—birds that come when children call them — Tzigele — games — songs — stories—all live here but no one who is too big to ride on Tzigele's back, or who sees the sun set.

MALKAH.

Why, what do you mean about not seeing the sun set?

THE REBBI *(confidentially)*.

The difference between a grown-up and a child in Aleph-Bes-Land is that the grown ups can pronounce long words like "tomorrow."

MALKAH.

Like my mother and father! They always say "tomorrow."

THE REBBI.

And so they don't play—they work in the sunshine for they think that is what it is made for. But Kinderlach fall asleep before the sun goes down and they do not even know the difference between today and tomorrow. They fall asleep in the sun and wake up in the sun. And so they play all day, for that's really what the sun is for.

MALKAH (*delighted*).

Are all the children of the world here?

REBBI.

No! I wish they were!

MALKAH.

Will these stay here forever?

REBBI (*regretfully*).

No. Only a very—very little while, before they start to learn. Then I take them elsewhere.

(Suddenly a loud shout is heard from the groups of children who have been playing quietly. They look off to the right, and some of them run there.)

SHOUTS OF THE KINDERLACH.

"A new one is coming!" "A new one!" "Quick!"
"It's a new story!" "Here he is!" "O come, quick!"

MALKAH

(Still in the corner, to the Rebbi).

What's that?

REBBI.

You are in the land where stories are made!

(The children drag in a young child, no older than themselves. He is dressed like a shepherd.)

THE PALESTINIAN CHILDREN.

"He's ours!" "From our land!" "O he's very real!"

ALL THE CHILDREN.

"He's real!" "He's very real!" "O he's real!"

(All the children sit down in a ring, and wait breathlessly for the story hero to begin.)

JOSEPH *(the hero)*.

(In center of the ring.)

—And so my brothers sold me for a slave.

(He puts his hand up before his eyes. All the little children on the stage imitate him entirely—in fact they become Josephs.)

ALL THE CHILDREN

(Each acting the same way, speak together).

—And so my brothers sold me for a slave.

(They rise and repeat his manner and action, carefully, all the while they watch him with intense zeal.)

JOSEPH *(the hero)*.

But come—with me to Egypt—I shall be a prince there!

(He points to the left and starts to walk off.)

ALL THE CHILDREN

(Imitate earnestly. They repeat).

But come—with me to Egypt. I shall be a prince there!

(Joseph leads off and every single child follows him exactly as if there were that many Josephs! And all go off the stage to Egypt.)

REBBI *(laughs)*.

That's what a real story is!

(Quite suddenly a group of the Letters of the Gate begin to come in. They enter very cautiously from the right, and look around, to make sure no children see them.

Then one Letter takes the place of the "Joseph" and all the other Letters take the place of the "children" and they act out everything Joseph and the children acted out, repeating everything exactly—only without speaking one word.

This very strange happening ends in the same way—the Joseph Letter goes off to the left and then all the Letters follow him off.)

MALKAH *(amazed)*.

What are they playing?

REBBI.

After a story happens once—real—my letters make a picture of the story.

MALKAH.

But where did the letters go—to Egypt, too?

REBBI.

No. Into a book!

(Another group of letters enter from the right. They dance and hum a song—the melody of “Unter die Greeninke Boimelach.” Then a few of these letters go out and bring in four tree-children, whom they place in four corners of the stage—and then the four tree-children become motionless. Their faces are covered with green arm-boughs.

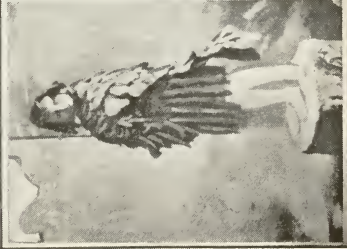
The Letters hum their song more and more loudly and dance in a ring around the “trees.”

REBBI.

And these are the Letters that make up the songs for my kinderlach.

(The Letters look off to the left and, seeing children approaching, they run off and disappear at the right of the stage.

Four very tiny Russian Jewish Kinderlach, little boys, with big black eyes and wearing side locks; dressed in odd, old-fashioned Tzizes and Kepotkelach, come in and sit at the foot of the “trees,” on the ground. The melody of Unter die Greeninke Boimelach is played off-stage. Tzigele frisks thru the scene running between the trees with a glad “Mee”—and then off. The four little children look up quickly, happy at Tzigele’s appearance.



LETTERS THAT TALK (SCENE II.)—YANKELE AND HIS MOTHER (SCENE V.)
 JEWISH BOYS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD IN ALEPH BES LAND (SCENE II.)
 THE BLACK BIRD (SCENE VII.)—THE WHITE BIRD (SCENE VII.)

Now the singing is clearly heard, and the four Kinderlach are acting out the song, line by line.

“UNTER DIE GREENINKE BOIMELACH.”

The four Moishelach and Shloimelach start a game of tag, with the tree-children as posts.

Then one of them discovers an apple on the ground—so it is “catch” for a while.

But mischievous Shloimelach must find some more lively game so he starts “fighting” by throwing down Moishelah. Poor Moishelah! He sticks his chubby fist into his eyes as if to ask the tears to begin to come down his cheeks.

But he is only “make believing.” As soon as he is seated on the ground, the others, believing it a good time to tease him, come up behind him; and one pulls his Tzitzis—one his “Kapotkeh,” and the third his earlock.

This is what Moishelah has been waiting for. He jumps up and is after them.

They are taken by surprise and all four tumble and roll on the ground, laughing in great glee.

When they are very tired of laughing they take hold of each others’ hands and sit in a row, shoulder to shoulder. They pretend to be blowing a wind through their lips.

But here the wind-children themselves appear. They dance in like fairies, and circle around, several times; once around a tree, once all around the stage, and once around the four Kinderlach, who jump and try to catch the winds.

There is a merry chase. The little fellows think

they have caught the winds, but these keep dancing and jumping away as soon as they feel a hand on them.

Now the birdies come to the rescue of the winds.

As soon as the Kinderlach see the birdies coming at them from all four sides they try to escape, but now both birds and winds are after the kiddies, and of course they are caught, and surrender, but not without several attempts to wriggle out.

The birdies force the four Kinderlach to join hands with each other in a little ring, they then escape with the winds, and disappear.

The little Kinderlach laugh merrily and sprawl under the trees.

End of the song, "Unter die Greeninke Boimelach."

MOISHELAH.

Aren't birds funny!

SHLOIMELAH.

I nearly caught the wind, but I couldn't hold it all myself. Why didn't you help me? (*They start to play again.*)

MALKAH

(*who has watched from her corner, now speaks to Rebbi*).

O, am I too grown-up? I want to sing and play with them too.

REBBI.

Stay and play. I will leave you soon. You are safe here.

MALKAH.

Stay with me until I go from here.

REBBI.

I can only stay till the sun is setting and the children fall asleep. Then I must go to other places in Aleph Bes Land where there are other kinds of Jewish children.

MALKAH.

As happy as these?

REBBI.

I can't tell you. But if you are awake when these are asleep you may come with me. If you are asleep I must leave you here.

(A loud happy shouting arises off-stage and immediately the troops of kiddies rush on the stage, full of tumultuous play-ground spirit. They shout and call joyfully.)

The Moishelach und Shloimelach, the Birds, Winds, and all the rest—even the trees, come into the mass of laughter and are caught up in the swirl of gayety.)

THE CHILDREN.

“Aleph Land! Aleph Land!” “Isn't it wonderful?” “I'm so happy!” “Play with me!”

(They suddenly observe Malkah and several rush for her.)

“Aleph Land!” “A new friend!” “A new Jewish girl in Aleph Land!” “Here's a new girl!” “Happy Street!” “Let's play!” “Hurrah!” etc.

(They begin to form a great ring around her, danc-

ing and singing, laughing and shouting all the time.)

MALKAH

(Embarrassed and bewildered).

Let me out of the ring. Please! I don't know anything about how to play in Aleph Bes Land!

ALL THE CHILDREN

(Very lively).

"We'll show you!" "Show the new girl!" etc.

(A smaller group twine themselves about Malkah and whirl her off to the side of the stage to watch; the rest form a large loose ring in the center of the stage and one child saunters forth merrily to sing "Unter die Greeninke Boime-lach" again. All join in immediately. At the end of the verse the Tzigele runs thru again.

Tzigele! Tzigele! He has raisins! Almonds!

(Tzigele throws raisins and almonds to all the children.)

(All form a great triumphant circle, with Malkah pedestaled in the center. Here is a scene of riotous child happiness in the great sweeping circle, the swinging melody and the cheers of all the children. And Malkah is the center of it all.)

MALKAH *(Cries suddenly).*

Rebbi! Rebbi! See, the sun is setting. It will be dark till tomorrow.

THE CHILDREN.

(Break the ring slowly, look about bewildered and puzzled).

“To-mor-row?” “To-mor-row?” “What’s that?”
“What is ‘to-morrow?’ ”

(And slowly, while they murmur, one by one drop away and fall slowly to the ground. Malkah struggles with herself, but also falls asleep. Even “Tzigelah,” sounds “Meeh” and then the whole stage is asleep. The Rebbi stands and surveys the scene. Tableaux. Darkness. Change of scene.)

SCENE IV.

“IN FRONT OF THE GATES OF ALEPH BES
LAND AGAIN.”

CHARACTERS:

Vov.

REBBI.

BES.

LONG CHOPH.

The Rebbi's fiddle is heard inside, in the Street of Joy, playing at the end "Unter Yidele's Vigle." Bes and Vov, two of the three Messenger Guards enter from Gate Bes. They search excitedly for the Rebbi, then knock on one gate after another, crying "Rebbi!" "Rebbi!" The Rebbi re-enters from Joy Street.)

Vov.

We have found him, Rebbi!

REBBI.

I-don't-care?

Vov.

Yes, I was guarding my night woods where sleeping little Jewish boys grow in their dreams when suddenly he tumbled out of the sky—

BES.

—With me!

REBBI (*anxiously*).

No one stopped growing on account of him?

Vov.

No! There were very, very few children in the grow by night woods. Only Yankele—the little

scholar. He is so wise and busy studying the Torah all day.

BES.

He has no time to grow when the sun shines.

Vov.

I take him to the woods every night and he doesn't know how big he has grown till he wakes up in the morning and tries to put his old clothes on to go to Cheder.

REBBI.

Only Yankele there?

Vov.

There's Choneh, he doesn't do anything but dream all day—so he must grow at night too! And Zekiel always wanting things during the day.

BES.

And Sholom was there too; he's the youngest in his house and there's no room for him to grow in his own home.

REBBI.

And how did it happen I-don't-care fell there?

BES.

As we went flying thru the new moon I asked him where he wanted to go. He said "I-don't-care!" So I landed him where he could grow.

REBBI.

Wise Bes! Who's on guard in the land where Jewish kinderlach grow, with Choneh and Zekiel, and Sholom, and Yankele, and I-don't-care.

Vov.

I left Long Choph. He promised to make them grow as long as his one leg.

REBBI.

You have done your duty. You may have your pictures taken again for the new Hebrew book. (*Long Choph rushes in.*)

LONG CHOPH (*panting*).

Come and help! O, Rebbi, help me!

REBBI.

What is it?

LONG CHOPH (*in terror*).

I can't make a certain little boy grow!

REBBI (*reproachfully*).

Long Choph! Have you failed in such easy work?

LONG CHOPH.

I can't! It's the new little boy!

REBBI.

I-don't-care?

LONG CHOPH.

That's it! That's what he says. He *refuses* to grow up. I can't *make* him, O I can't *make* him—O! help!

REBBI.

Does he know where he is?

LONG CHOPH.

Yes—That is why he says he does not want to grow up. And O—Rebbi—he's spoiling the other

children—he's talking so wildly—I can't understand *why*—but I know Ezekiel and the others won't grow either tonight—and what kind of a letter will you say I—am—I feel so small. (*Goes down on his knees in shame.*)

REBBI.

It is a very serious matter. Does he demand anything you *can't* give him?

LONG CHOPH (*piqued*).

He doesn't even recognize me or—my—position!

REBBI.

Does he cry?

LONG CHOPH.

No, only refuses to grow up. Says "I don't care!"

REBBI.

Then *I* must go myself—forward Letters to the Land where the Kinderlach grow. Thru the gates of Love! (*Calls off-stage.*) Letters! (*All the Letters except Aleph, Gimel, Toph, Shin and Nun rush in.*) Stand guard! Await my call!

(*Bes opens the middle gate. The Rebbi turns to the other Letters.*)

No more songs till this child is happy and the third child is found.

BES

(*Opens Gate Bes, and calls aloud*).

Prepare the land of love! The Rebbi comes!
(*All the letters stand at attention against the wall. The Rebbi passes thru gate. Darkness. Change of Scene.*)

SCENE V.

"THE LAND WHERE JEWISH CHILDREN
GROW."

CHARACTERS:

I-DON'T-CARE.

YANKELE, *the wise little student.*CHONEH, *the dreamer.*'ZEKIEL, *very hungry.*SHOLOM, *timid.*

CHONEH'S MOTHER.

YANKELE'S MOTHER.

ZEKIEL'S MOTHER.

}	Four little
	Russian
	Jewish
	Boys.

SHOLOM'S MOTHER.

THE REBBI.

"BES."

THE LETTERS OF THE ALPHABET.

(The setting is very much like the one in which The Land of Joy was seen. There is the same suggestion of woods in background and at the sides. But the human trees are gone. The mood, too, is very different. This is moonlight, and a quaint dreamlike atmosphere of phantasy and poetry gives character to the scene.)

As the curtains part, I-don't-care is seen in the center of the stage, seated on a tree-stump. The moon is shining down on his face.

Before him, on the ground, are four little Russian Jewish boys, like those of the previous scene, but apparently grown up several years, into the age of the Cheder. They are dressed in Tzizis, Kapotkelach, etc.; but now they are no longer joyous. Their most striking characteristic is their wan wise little expressions.

The four are in the following tableaux—

At the extreme right is Yankele, an "old man child," with burning, eager eyes and a sad, knowing face. Next is Choneh, a dreamy little fellow. In the center of the semi-circle is I-don't-care. Then to the left, is Zekiel, whose look is of a lad who is eternally hungry. Finally at the extreme left is Sholom, a shy, cramped fellow, who is always afraid of taking up too much room, and is crowding himself fearfully, though the space is large and open.

The first impression you get is of a rebel I-don't-care, preaching defiance to a crew of four very much shocked youngsters... Inwardly, secretly, they sympathize and wish they could have his courage—but their sense of being "good Jewish kinder" forbids anything except horror at this strange defiance.)

I-DON'T-CARE (*doggedly*).

I don't care! I have made up my mind. I will not grow up!

CHONEH

(*Whispers, trembling, to Yankele*).

Where is his mother?

YANKELE.

She must have gone for a doctor.

I-DON'T-CARE

(*Overheard what they said*).

(*Scornfully*) A doctor indeed! I tried to talk to my mother all day long, and she never understood me! Because she thinks I'm a baby!

YANKELE (*very wise*).

Wait till you're grown up—like me. You'll know all the words in the world then.

I-DON'T-CARE (*quickly*).

I know them now. It's better to be like me. I still remember what the angels told me. You don't.

YANKELE (*hurt*).

But I have learned *words*, and *things*, and how to obey.

I-DON'T-CARE.

But I will never grow up, I tell you, I will never grow up!

THE REBBI (*enters with Vov*).

You are in my kingdom. I understand every word you speak.

I-DON'T-CARE (*pathetically*).

And do *you* think I am wrong?

REBBI.

No. I am the Rebbi. I know the hearts of children. Perhaps you are right. Tell me why you do not want to grow up. It hurts your mother so when you don't.

I-DON'T-CARE.

I don't care to. My angel told me what will become of me when I grow up to be a Jewish man. I will be sad all day. I will cry sometimes, and sometimes I will just be still because I will be ashamed to cry. My angel says all Jewish children are born for that.

YANKELE

But you will learn so much by it, won't he, Rebbi?

I-DON'T-CARE.

I don't want to grow up, then. I'll stay as I am now.

SHOLOM.

You can't! Your mamma will say you are very sick, and cry over you!

I-DON'T-CARE.

There! Cry! Salt tears—that's it; cry all day. I think children must be loved, and if you cry it is a sign your mother doesn't love you, isn't it?

CHONEH (*dreamily*).

I think that's how Jewish mothers love—when they cry.

I-DON'T-CARE.

I will *not* be a Jewish boy then.

REBBI (*sternly*).

But you must! You have a Jewish mother.

I-DON'T-CARE.

I'll go back.

ZEKIEL.

You'll be hungrier there!

Vov (*desperately*).

I cannot let a Jewish mother lose her boy!

REBBI (*softly*).

Is it so sad to be a Jewish child in the world? Tell him Choneh, Zekiel, Sholom, Yankele.

SHOLOM (*timidly*).

The truth?

REBBI.

Of course! This is my own Kingdom. (*The children begin to unburden their hearts.*)

SHOLOM.

I am grown up. I am seven years old. I have never played. My mother says a Jewish boy must study, not play.

CHONEH.

My mother cuffs me everyday. I am dreaming about birds, and (*sobbing*) Jewish—boys—mustn't talk of such things.

ZEKIEL.

I think my mother doesn't like me at all. When it was my birthday she kissed me—and every other day she says I'm good for nothing, and I go hungry. (*The sobs are contagious—all the four weep.*)

I-DON'T-CARE.

And you're crying! You're crying! Because you're grown up—big Jewish boys! Seven years old—eight years old! All day you cry—because you're Jewish children.

CHONEH (*slyly*).

O no! I only cry half the time, but I do it so hard, I fall asleep in half an hour—and I know when I'm asleep (*confidentially*) my father isn't angry with me. My father pats my head. *Fathers kiss you when you're asleep!*

ZEKIEL (*outraged*).

I don't believe it!

SHOLOM (*same*).

How do you know?

CHONEH (*sheepishly*).

I made believe I was asleep once—my father kissed me—I remember—

REBBI (*tenderly*).

Poor little fellows—if your mothers only explained things to you.. Yodh—(*calls off stage*) quick, bring their mothers.

I-DON'T-CARE

(*More defiant than ever*).

I don't care! My angel told me what my mother is going to do to me. I will not grow up!....

(*The four "Mamelach" enter. They are old, before their time—They are dressed in "fa-tche-les" and wigs, wearing old fashioned skirts and waists. The entrance of these mothers is like the movement of figures walking in a dream. Yodh leads them with a magic spell, into the center of the half-ring of children.*)

CHONEH'S MOTHER (*frightened*).

What is this?

SHOLOM'S MOTHER (*same*).

My children?....

ALL FOUR.

Are my children safe in bed?

(*The four kinderlach stare, but remain motionless.*)

REBBI.

Safe! Safe! Don't you see you have come to the land of your kinderlach; I summoned you.

YANKELE'S MOTHER (*anxiously*).

Is it in a dream? If it is day I cannot stay. My child needs me.

REBBI.

You are asleep far away and so are your little ones, but I have brought you to my land to answer the questions your children never dare ask you in the day time.

YODH (*aside to Rebbi*).

I and several other letters fell from her lips in a dream. She thought she was saying her little boy's name.

REBBI (*to I-don't-care*).

Listen carefully and you will understand!

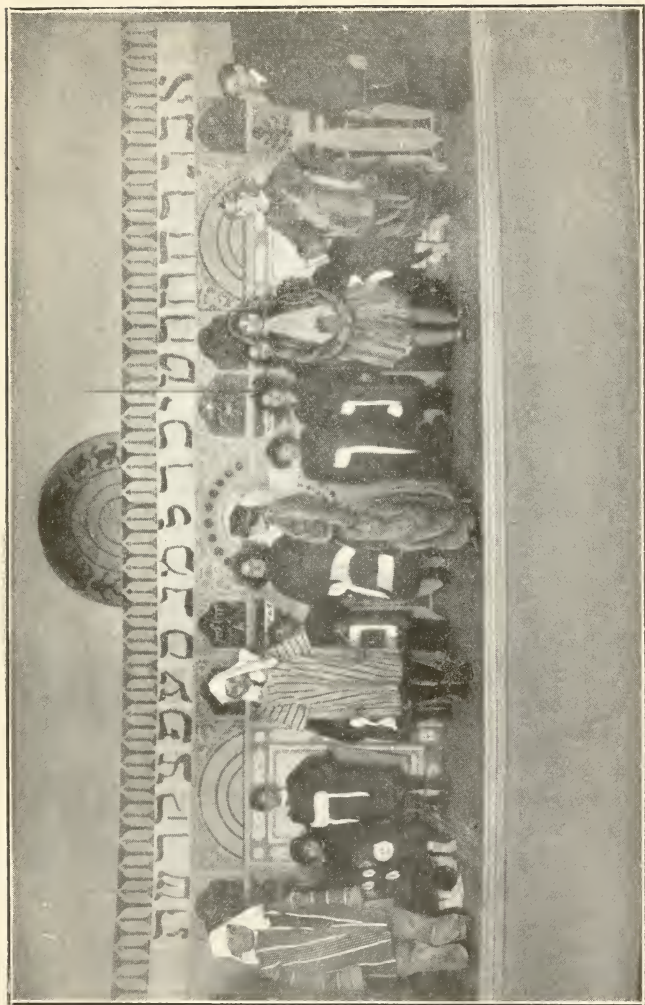
(The Rebbi motions; the children suddenly spring up and each rushes to his mother, and lovingly brings her near him. Greetings, signs of childish affection, etc.

The four little families take separate places, as the children sat before; and although all are supposedly talking, the audience hears one group at a time, according as the Rebbi directs I-don't-care's attention.)

REBBI.

Remember where you are. Speak out what is in your hearts.

(Directs attention towards Choneh and his mother and we hear.)



THE REBBI WELCOMES THE CHILDREN INTO ALPHI BES LAND (SCENE III.)

CHONEH

(*With a child's yearning*).

Mother, why aren't Jewish fathers allowed to love their children?

MOTHER.

A Jewish boy mustn't ask such questions!

CHONEH (*wearily*).

There! There! I am so tired of hearing what a Jewish boy mustn't do!

THE REBBI

(*Sternly to Choneh's mother*).

Do you mean that?

MOTHER

(*No longer able to restrain herself*).

O my little son, if you knew how we love you! How I love you!

CHONEH (*pleading*).

Then why don't you say it to me when I'm in the house?

MOTHER.

I am ashamed, child.

CHONEH (*dreamily*).

Is there anything mothers are ashamed of? I thought only *Jewish children* must be ashamed.

MOTHER.

My dear, no! You are all I have in the world—and if I told you how very much I care for you, my little Jewish child—it would be too much—I'm afraid you could never love me so much!

CHONEH

(Throwing his arms around her).

Mother I do love you so much!

(Attention is turned towards 'Zekiel and his the midst of his conversation. The first we hear is..)

SHOLOM *(pleading).*

Then, mother, tell me, *why* mustn't I play?

MOTHER.

I don't know, except because you are a Jew, and little Jews must not waste time on such things.

SHOLOM.

Didn't *you* want to play when you were a little girl?

MOTHER *(slowly, musing).*

Yes.

SHOLOM *(tries to rise).*

I do! O *you* understand! *(He beams suddenly at his mother.)* You *want* me to play. If I were allowed you would *want* me to play. I'm so glad.

(Mother touched, weeps.)

(Attention is turned towards Yankele and his mother.)

MOTHER.

Yes, but you must learn, otherwise how can you be a good Jew?

YANKELE *(very wearily).*

There is so much to learn, so much to learn! Always to learn—never to play!

(*Attention is turned towards 'Zekiel and his mother.'*)

ZEKIEL (*longingly*).

Mother, why do I never eat eggs fried with butter?

MOTHER (*tenderly*).

It costs too much. We Jews are poor. We must not waste.

ZEKIEL.

But say mother, can't I just *want* to have it. Why do you scold me so for *wanting*?

MOTHER.

A good little Jew must not want to eat all the time. He must want to learn.

ZEKIEL (*insistently*).

But how can I learn if I am hungry?

MOTHER

(*Her sternness melts. She breaks down*).

O—O—O—Darling mine—don't make me cry—I know how very hard it is for you to learn without eating. But I wish I could give you all the good in the world. I wish! I—I love you....

ZEKIEL (*softly, gladly*).

O mother, you love me! Don't cry! I'll be a big man soon (*pathetically*). Only if I *know* you love me! And if you won't scold me for *wanting*....

(*As if impelled again by some strange force, the four mothers rise and go off, weeping. They depart as they came, in a trance.*)

I-DON'T-CARE.

I know! All Jewish mothers must cry or else their children must cry. I do not want to be a Jewish child.

YANKELE (*shocked*).

Hush! You must!

ZEKIEL (*scornfully*).

You're a baby!

CHONEH (*grinning thru tears*).

My mother really loves me!

SHOLOM (*in ecstasy*).

I heard my mother say she loved me.

I-DON'T-CARE (*irreconcilable*).

Is that the way! I'm glad I'm a baby. Now my mother isn't ashamed to tell me. When I grow up she'll cry all day long instead of loving!...

REBBI (*quickly*).

You are late in growing up already! Your mother dreams bad dreams on account of you. Come.

(*He turns towards the right and speaks, wizard fashion.*)

Yodh, He, Vov
Bring the book of Love;
Bring the book and show—
How a Jew may grow,
What makes mothers love
Hurry Yodh, Heh, Vov.

(*Sounds of activity off stage.*)

I-don't-care, you shall see what makes Jewish mothers happy and what makes them love their children.

(Yodh, Heh and Vov bring in a very large book—like a magnificent Bible. They carry it respectfully and carefully.)

All four kinderlach rush up to take hold of it, and the Letters turn over the book to the children. These sit down on the ground, open it, and all four peer wisely into it.

Then they become engrossed in its study, and forget all their hunger, timidity and dreaminess. A chant as of the students in a cheder rises from the throats of the four kinderlach.)

(During this pantomime the three letters who brought in the book, quarrel.)

YODH (*filled with vanity*).

The Book has my picture in oftener than yours.

HEH.

Mine the most!

Vov.

It's the Rebbi's biggest book.

YODH (*interrupts, fervently*).

The Bible!

Vov.

I'm sure I'm in it most.

REBBI (*to the Letters*).

Hush! Stand aside! The mothers are coming!

(The letters move off the stage. The four Kinderlach's chant grows higher, more earnest and fiery. I-don't-care watches fascinated.)

I-DON'T-CARE

(Hardly believing, but admiringly).

They are really happy! They are singing!

REBBI.

Do you see what they are doing? Hush!

(The four mothers enter, again as in a dream. But now their faces are flushed with joy. They seem transformed—years younger, and unspeakably happy. They stand behind the children, who go on unheedingly. The mothers listen a few minutes. Every face is a picture of divine joy. Then the ecstasy breaks out into glad cries.)

YANKELE'S MOTHER *(thrilled)*.

My—Yankele—is—learning!

CHONEH'S MOTHER *(likewise listening)*.

Choneh—will be—a—Rabbi! Hear—hear!..

'ZEKIEL'S MOTHER *(beaming down)*.

'Zekiel, 'Zekiel—you are such a joy to me!

SHOLOM'S MOTHER

(Almost beyond herself with joy).

Sholom'll—Sholom'll's voice! Hear how he learns!

(The little children have not noticed their mothers' presence. Now Yankele's mother bends down to

kiss him. As she puts her arm around his neck he turns about annoyed and wonderingly, scarcely recognizing her.)

YANKELE

(Dreamily, puts her away gently).

Not now, mother, not now. Two more pages to learn! *(The mother laughs.)*

(The other mothers have been doing similarly and in turn we hear each child's protest as he turns to disengage himself from his mother.)

CHONEH.

Please let me! I'm dreaming of long ago and I can't stop now.

'ZEKIEL.

Mother, I forgot everything. Let me—

SHOLOM.

There is so much place to think here—I mustn't. .
(But the happy mothers are insistent. Almost by force they lift their little dreamy eyed boys away from the large Book. The children struggle. The mothers jolly, and motherly, smother the little ones with hugs and kisses. As they go off we hear.)

CHONEH'S MOTHER.

Come home, play a little!

'ZEKIEL'S MOTHER.

I have fried eggs in butter.

'ZEKIEL *(wonderingly).*

In butter?

SHOLOM'S MOTHER.

Come—a little boy must stretch—

YANKELE'S MOTHER.

The sun is shining—wake up Yankele! wake up! Can't you hear me—How big you are! Did you grow all in one night? Wake up—It's soon time for cheder!

(In this way the four little families go off, cuddled close together and very, very happy.

Only the Rebbi, the Letter Vov and the astonished I-don't-care are left. The large book is on the ground, in the rays of new sunlight. I-don't-care has been at the back of the stage. He jumps up suddenly.)

I-DON'T-CARE.

I care! I want to be a Jewish boy. I want my mother to love me so! Give *me* the Book!

REBBI.

You must learn!

I-DON'T-CARE.

I will! But I want the book!

(As he starts forward down stage to seize the Book, a sudden cry is heard and all the letters of the Alphabet except Toph, Nun and Shin, rush in; half the group from each side of the stage. They form a strong wall, between I-don't-care and the Book.)

I-DON'T-CARE (*taken by surprise*).

Who are these? I want the Book. Stand aside! I *must* get the Book!

THE REBBI.

My *servants* stand in your way—Till you learn
who my servants are you cannot have the book.

I-DON'T-CARE (*passionately*).

But I am a Jewish child!

REBBI.

Then learn what a Jewish child must know. Tell
them who you are! Morning is coming—quick!

(*All the letters shout their names to him. I-don't-care eagerly repeats one by one. Every letter whose name is repeated steps back and opens the "wall" further. Finally the "wall" is open—I-don't-care rushes to the book and looks into it.*)

Vov (*gladly*).

He will grow! He will learn! He will love and
be loved! He is a Jewish child!

I-DON'T-CARE.

(*Peers deeper and deeper into the secret of the book—happier and happier each moment. The Letters form a large semi-circle in back of him, from one side of the stage to the other. The Rebbi sings to the tune of Auf'n Pripichek.*)

Learn my little men, and when you grow old,
In wisdom and in years,
You will learn the dreams the ancient letters hold
And what sighs and tears,
You will learn the dreams the ancient letters hold
And what sighs and tears.

REFRAIN (*all the Letters sing*).

O my little man, Learn the lesson well

“Kometz Aleph O.”

In the cheder mark ye, what ye hear me tell—

“Kometz Aleph O,”

In the cheder mark ye, what ye hear me tell—

“Kometz Aleph O.”

(*Tableaux*—“*I-don't-care*” studies fervidly from the Book—The Rebbi sings—the Letters stand around.

Darkness—change of Scene.)

SCENE VI.

“IN FRONT OF GATES OF ALEPH BES
LAND.”

CHARACTERS:

ASK-A-LOT.

NUN.

REBBI.

TOPH.

SHIN.

ALL THE LETTERS.

(The Rebbi enters alone from Gate Bes, finishing the last bars of Auf'n Pripichek.

Ask-a-Lot, a walking question, enters, followed by Shin and Nun and Toph.

The letters seem exhausted and ready to fall at each question she asks. Evidently she has been asking questions all the time.)

ASK-A-LOT.

Is this where the letters live? *(Seeing the Rebbi.)*
O Rebbi, why don't they answer my questions?
Is this Aleph Bes Land? Why did they bring me
here? Will you let me in?

REBBI.

Ask-a-Lot, here is Aleph Bes Land. Guards.
(The two letters salute weakly.) You have been
sufficiently punished by having to answer all her
questions. Stand at attention!

(They do so. To Ask-a-Lot who has been asking silent but eloquent questions with inquiring jerks of her head.)

In here *(pointing to Happy Street)* is your Mis-

tress Malkah. And in here is your brother, I-don't-care. He cares now. Where do you want to go?

ASK-A-LOT

(Approaching Help Street, the one marked "Gimel").

Would I get lost if I went alone in here?

REBBI.

No. But no one may pass the gates who does not know my servants. Letters!

(The Letters begin to troop in from the opposite side of the stage, but one has no more than showed himself than "Ask-a-Lot" asks—)

ASK-A-LOT.

Isn't that Daled?

(So Daled disappears again.

The same with each letter, which appears and is at once recognized by the questioning little girl, then disappears again. This happens so rapidly as to make it humorous. Gimel alone stands in front of his gate.

The Rebbi is surprised—stops her flood of questions.)

REBBI.

Shin, how did this happen?

SHIN.

She asked us so many questions on the way about our friends, and our land, we had to describe them.

REBBI (*laughs*).

Questions are good for little Jewish girls, if they are about such matters. Now you may enter the gates. You will see all things that no other children see. I will send a blue-bird to help you, and I will make the trees talk for you.

ASK-A-LOT (*eagerly approaching*).

Now? Where shall I go? Will you let me in, Mister Gimel?

(*Gimel steps aside.*)

REBBI.

Go till you come to a great woods of winter trees and then—the bird will tell you, and Malkah and your brother will meet you, and the trees will teach you to pray.

(*The two letters bow ceremoniously to the Rebbi and open Help Street Gate for her.*)

Get ready to answer the questions of a Jewish child. Ask-a-Lot is coming!

(*Ask-a-Lot passes through the gate.*)

(*Darkness—change of scene.*)

SCENE VII.

"HELP STREET."

CHARACTERS:

*"I-DON'T-CARE," a boy-doll.**"ASK-A-LOT," a girl-doll.*

NINE TREES.

THE WHITE BIRD.

THE BLUE BIRD.

MALKAH.

THE BLACK BIRD.

THE LETTERS.

SCENE: *A woods represented by nine or more little girls dressed as trees.*

There are larger and smaller trees, some turned away, some standing sidewise and leaning on another. Their faces are covered.

The bodies of the trees, the floor of the forest and hanging boughs are snow-touched.

The woods has a little semi-circular clearing towards the front of the stage.

Part of the woods where the action of the play takes place is quite dark except for the snowlight.

Mnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn! There is a whistling through the "trees," which sway with the wind.

Ask-a-Lot is just coming into the woods from the back right hand corner.

She treads her circuitous way about the trees, looking up wonderingly and questioningly at Tree 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, as she passes them, finally coming into the open space in front of five; all this time her wonder and fear grow. Each whistle of the wind brings new terror.)

ASK-A-LOT (*to herself*).

Am I in the woods of Help Street?

WINDS (*whistle*).

Yea! M-M-M-M!

ASK-A-LOT.

Where am I? (*Cries to the distance.*) Brother, where are you? O, ho! Where are you?

I-DON'T-CARE'S VOICE (*off-stage*).

I'm in Jewish Love Street. I don't care to come out.

ASK-A-LOT.

O please come, brother! Why don't you come here? Don't you see I need you!

I-DON'T-CARE'S VOICE.

Where?

ASK-A-LOT.

Can't you hear my voice? I'm exploring a new place in Aleph Bes Land. Won't you please come? (*Pause. I-don't-care, enters sullenly.*)

I-DON'T-CARE.

Well, we're in the woods now. (*Wind whistles.*) Oo, what did you want to bring me here for?

ASK-A-LOT.

Don't you know, in Aleph Bes Land—

I-DON'T-CARE.

I know that as well as you do and I don't care.

My Rebbi gives us good things to eat. Now you made me miss the raisins and the almonds and everything. It's silly to go to the cold woods today.

ASK-A-LOT.

No it isn't. The Rebbi said I would find Help Street here. I-don't-care, listen! (*Wind whistles, trees shake.*) Did you hear? Didn't you know trees talk and if you go into the woods and you listen, you hear wonderful things? (*He is not convinced.*) Aren't you glad I called you? We'll hear everything. Did any of the girls or boys ever hear trees talk?

I-DON'T-CARE.

I am going right back. I'll tell mother in Happy Street something's the matter with you. I don't want to hear trees talk! (*wind whistles.*) Ooooo, it's cold! I want to be in my Love Street, where I can grow.

ASK-A-LOT.

Oh, I-don't-care, won't you stay with me?

I-DON'T-CARE.

Stay yourself! You'll see you'll catch cold. Now you're a real girl and live girls always catch cold.

ASK-A-LOT.

I won't! Am I not a doll?

I-DON'T-CARE.

And you'll get sick—I tell you.

ASK-A-LOT.

Why will I?

I-DON'T-CARE.

And the Aleph Bes Land doctor will give you a bitter medicine—

ASK-A-LOT.

He won't! Isn't he a nice doctor?—

I-DON'T-CARE.

And you'll be sick for ten nights if you don't come right away—I don't care—

ASK-A-LOT.

I won't! Please stay with me I-don't-Care! Don't you know the Trees might say wonderful things?

I-DON'T-CARE.

I will not! I'm going straight back to Cheder. Ummm, won't I enjoy the raisins and the almonds. You won't get any.

(He goes off. During his speech the wind has whistled accompaniment. The sound of the wind has hushed when he spoke, but now as little Ask-a-Lot follows him a little, and then, evidently losing him, returns to the front of the stage and sinks down and weeps in fear, the whistle of the wind changes to a tender, soothing tone.

A Blue Bird enters, fluttering about Ask-a-Lot who has her eyes closed.)

BLUEBIRD.

Tweet! Tweet!

ASK-A-LOT

(Suddenly opening her eyes).

Who are you, Birdie?

BIRD.

Don't you know me any more? Don't you remember one day last winter? I was very tired and hungry and I flew till I fell on your window sill. Then Malkah took me in and warmed me, and her crumbs were so sweet tasting, and when her brother, Yankele, wanted to put me in a cage—

ASK-A-LOT.

Of course she wouldn't let him. Are you the little bird she sent through the window when Springtime came?

BIRD.

Yes, and I flew till I came to my home!

ASK-A-LOT.

Is this your home? How big you are!

BIRD.

Tweet, tweet. Do I look big to you? Tweet, tweet, hush a moment!

(There is a moment's pause during which the bird seems to be listening to something which the trees are saying, but only a murmur as of an indistinct chant, can be heard, and suddenly the birdie pipes out, "Omen! Omen!")

ASK-A-LOT.

Are they really talking?

BIRD.

Praying! Tweet, tweet! Hush! *(Another listening pause.)* Omen!

ASK-A- LOT.

I don't hear anything.

BIRD.

They're going to say their Shmone Esre Prayer standing. Now I can talk to you for a little while.

ASK-A-LOT (*enthusiastically*).

Trees praying! Are they really praying! Where is their Synagogue!

BIRD.

(*Pointing to the snow everywhere*).

Look at this!

ASK-A-LOT.

On the ground, on the side of the trees? (*Touches it.*) Isn't it snow?

BIRD.

If only you were a little birdie you would know what this is. (*Touching the snow on the ground.*) This carpet is for the Synagogue and these (*pointing to the snow on the branches*) are white dresses, and this, of course, (*pointing to the snow on the trees*) is the Talith they are all wearing; and what do you think this is? (*Indicating the swaying of the trees.*)

ASK-A-LOT.

That is the wind, isn't it birdie?

BIRD.

Tweet, tweet! That is the way the trees pray. This is the day of judgment for all trees. Today God measures the fruit of every tree and sees if it

is good. And if it please God, He says, "This tree shall live another year and be full of fruit."

ASK-A-LOT.

O is it New Years for the Trees today? Isn't it lucky for me? Trees love their fruit like mothers love their children, like Malkah loves me, don't they birdie?

BIRD.

Just the same, Ask-a-Lot. And today is the day when the trees pray for a Happy New Year.

ASK-A-LOT.

Rosh Hashonoh for trees! I understand!

BIRD.

Tweet, tweet! (*Pause.*) Omen!

ASK-A-LOT.

And could I hear them pray and answer Omen, too? But I'm not a little birdie and maybe they wouldn't want me to answer Omen to them.

BIRD.

Oh yes. All winter they have been waiting for someone like you to come!

ASK-A-LOT.

For me? But how shall I know when to answer, if I cannot hear them?

BIRD.

Answer with me first and then you hear them.

(*They both pause, a low indistinct chant is heard and the bird quickly pipes out "Omen." Ask-a-Lot joins in immediately.*) "Omen!" Now do you hear them?

(*A murmur becomes distinct. The chant grows louder. Suddenly words are heard and as the next verse is sung, the coverings fall from the heads of the trees and reveal faces.. The trees say in unison—*

Oh brothers in the faraway,
See us bend, see us sway.
For you, for you alone, we pray,
Brothers, on this New Year's day.

ASK-A-LOT.

They are alive! I heard the trees pray, even if I am only a doll. (*She rushes to them.*) For whom were they praying? Not for themselves?

BIRD.

Trees are not selfish. They never pray for themselves, but to help their brothers and sisters far away.

ASK-A-LOT (*turning to the trees*).

What are your brothers' and sisters' names?

FIRST TREE.

Tree of Sharon is my brother.

SECOND TREE.

'Tree of Carmel is my brother.

THIRD TREE.

Tree of Lebanon is my sister.

BIRD (*interrupting*).

O, they have many far away.

ASK-A-LOT.

Where is far away?

BIRD.

In Palestine. Hush! (*The trees commence their prayers again.*)

TREES (*in unison*).

God in heaven up above,
Give our brothers far away,
On this morn of New Year's day,
Fruit, and sunlight and Thy love!

BIRD AND ASK-A-LOT (*together*).

Omen!

TREE FIVE (*the elder*).

Brothers, she has come!

TREE ONE

(*Bending over to Tree Three*).

She has come!

TREE TWO

(*Bending over to Tree Three*).

She has come! (*Etc., the murmur goes from tree to tree.*)

ASK-A-LOT.

The trees are moving! (*Trees, still murmuring, advance toward the center of the stage surrounding Tree Five.*) How can trees move?

BIRD.

On New Year's day more wonderful things happen than that. I will tell them about you.

(*Advancing to tree five, an elder tree.*)

This little girl has come to help you pray for yourself. (*They jump back into their position with a murmur of horror.*)

TREE FIVE.

We never pray for ourselves. (*The trees murmur as before.*) We never pray for ourselves.

ASK-A-LOT

(*Half aside, to Birdie.*)

I am so glad, because I never could pray without a Sidur. Can you?

TREE FIVE.

Little Jewish maiden have you seen our messenger coming? You can see outside the woods. Not like us. We must always stay here.

ASK-A-LOT.

What messenger? I don't know what you mean.

TREE FIVE.

Bird. (*Other trees murmur.*) Bird of course.

OTHER TREES.

Bird of course.

ASK-A-LOT.

What does the tree mean?

BIRD.

Tweet, tweet! Don't you know? Every New Year's Day all the trees send their little message of love to each other.

ASK-A-LOT.

Like New Year's Cards?

BIRD.

And the messengers are birds. Here it is winter but on Rosh Hashonoh L'llonos, in far away Palestine it is Spring and they plant trees and are jolly there on this day. So every year the trees of Palestine send these brothers and sisters a little white bird for a messenger and the little white bird comes among the trees and "tweet—tweet!" and laughs and says, "Your brothers are growing bigger and bigger and more and more fruitful."

TREE FOUR.

And every year the white bird is whiter.

TREE FIVE.

And its "tweet, tweet," sounds sweeter.

TREE SIX.

And it is happier and happier.

TREE SEVEN.

It says that the Jewish trees in Palestine grow more beautiful every year.

BIRD.

And O, it tells of little boys and girls no older

than yourself who laugh and play out there among the trees and the sunshine and how they plant new trees today.

TREE FIVE (*gravely*).

Where is our messenger from Palestine today?

ASK-A-LOT (*looking off*).

I see a bird flying here. (*Trees move forward again.*)

TREE ONE.

Is it white?

TREE TWO.

Very white?

TREE THREE.

And laughing?

BIRD.

Tweet, tweet!

TREE SIX.

And beautiful?

TREE SEVEN.

And swift?

ASK-A-LOT (*looking off*).

No, it is slow. It's wing is broken, it is weeping; it does not laugh at all. It is black.

ALL.

Black!

ASK-A-LOT.

Here it is!

(*The blackbird rushes in. The trees are shocked. They sway forward and then back as though struck. Some put their hands before their faces to weep; the trees step back in horror, one by one.*)

TREE ONE.

It isn't white.

TREE TWO.

Not white at all.

TREE THREE.

It is weeping.

TREE SIX.

And not beautiful....

ALL TREES.

Poor black bird!

BLACKBIRD.

O dear trees, I have come from your brothers and sisters in Palestine. (*Trees murmur "Why are you black, little bird?"*) They are so unhappy. Your brothers and sisters are crying all day to-day. They are drying away!

TREE FIVE.

Where are the men who take care of them?

BLACKBIRD.

I don't know but I heard a little sister tree say that there was "a war". (*Murmuring among the trees, "A war, a war, what is a war?"*) I don't know. Many Jewish fathers and mothers are dead and there is no one to take care of the trees of Palestine.

BLUE BIRD.

Where are the little Jewish girls and boys of Palestine?

BLACKBIRD.

They are sad because of the war and are hungry and weak. They do not plant any trees today. Oh

pray for the trees of Palestine! (*Murmuring among the trees.*)

SOME TREES.

Oh little sisters far away.

OTHERS.

We are sorry, little sisters far away.

OTHERS.

And brothers far away.

OTHERS.

We are sorry, little brothers far away.

TREE FIVE.

Go, Bluebird, and tell our brothers and sisters in unhappy Palestine we are sorry for them and we will help them; each one of us will give something to take to them. Here is my little green branch; give it to some poor sister without a bough. It is the last green branch I have. (*The Bluebird busies himself with collecting from the trees.*)

TREE ONE.

Take my little bit of fruit; I hid it all winter under the snow. Give it to a little sister tree in Palestine.

TREE THREE.

Take my seeds to plant there.

TREE FOUR.

Under my shoulder I have some sap. Take it to my brother in Palestine.

TREE FIVE.

And I send this—

TREE SIX.

And please, take this—

ASK-A-LOT.

I want to send something too. Take my little purse.

BLUEBIRD.

Birdies do not carry purses. They only carry love and messages and seeds and sunshine and kisses, but I will carry your love to the little trees in Palestine if you wish me to do so.

ASK-A-LOT.

Please take my love and kisses and tell the little trees in Palestine I will never forget them.

BLUEBIRD.

Good-bye, little Ask-a-Lot. (*She leans over to kiss her.*)

ASK-A-LOT.

Farewell. You know my name, what is yours?

BLUEBIRD.

I have a queer little name.

ASK-A-LOT.

What is it little birdie?

BLUEBIRD.

“Help.” My brother faraway is called “Hope.” Perhaps you will meet him some day too. Farewell. (*She goes off.*)

TREE FIVE.

Come to prayer, prayer for our brothers and sisters far away.

TREES (*murmuring.*)

Pray, pray for our brothers and sisters far away.

ASK-A-LOT (*with enthusiasm.*)

Oh you beautiful trees of God; you love your brothers and sisters of Palestine and want to help them, but Oh, *I* love them more! Let me pray for them! Oh wonderful trees may I pray with you?

TREE FIVE.

Yes, pray. (*Trees murmur "Pray, pray for them."*) Be our chazon.

ASK-A-LOT.

Chazon? What is that?

TREE FIVE.

Say the words in Hebrew, from the book.

ASK-A-LOT (*bewildered.*)

But how should I know the words? O how can I learn them?

TREE FIVE

(*Talking to the distance.*)

O Rebbi! Rebbi! You taught us the prayers once, send your messengers to teach this child.

ASK-A-LOT.

Is it my friend the Rebbi, you are talking to? (*She looks off-stage; she is astonished.*) Who are these coming? Are they my friends? I know!

(The Letters all troop in and stand in squads before her. She understands and "reads" each squad, then they change places and re-arrange themselves into other formations which she continues to read.)

ASK-A-LOT (*chants*).

Boruch—Atoh—

(The Letters are about to change again when Blackbird who has stood guard at the edge of the stage cries out suddenly.)

BLACKBIRD.

See! Another messenger!

THE TREES.

"Who?" "Who is it?" etc. (*Commotion.*)

WHITE BIRD

(Flies in; very happily).

ALL

(Recognizing her, joyfully).

Hope!

WHITE BIRD (*cheerfully*).

Tweet! tweet! I come to tell you the trees of Palestine and the little children are happy again...

ALL.

Happy?

WHITE BIRD.

They have received your gifts and your love through my sister. And I have come to tell you very good news—

VOICES (*eagerly*).

What? What is it? Speak! Quick! (*All the trees, the letters and Ask-a-Lot crowd around her.*)

WHITE BIRD.

Sh! Sh! It's a secret. (*They all come closer about her.*) But I can whisper to you that after the war—

(*She lowers her voice and speaks into the ears of the crowd about her so that only they, but not you, can hear her. But you can well imagine, for after this whisper everyone breaks away with loud shouts and screams of joy. The stage is a bedlam of happiness.*)

VOICES OF TREES, LETTERS.

"Hoorah!" "Did you hear!" "There is hope!" "The Land will belong to them!" "They will bloom again!" etc., etc.

BLACKBIRD (*interrupting*).

Hush, human beings are coming into the woods. Do not let them hear you.

(*The trees, understanding, take their former places and act like trees again. Blackbird and Bluebird and the Letters run off.*)

TREE FIVE.

Let us say the silent prayer!

I-DON'T-CARE'S VOICE (*from off stage*).

Ho! Ask—a—L—o——t!

(*Ask-a-Lot is in front of the stage. She appears dazed. I-don't-care's voice comes nearer.*)

I-DON'T-CARE.

This is the place! (*He rushes in and finds her.*)
Here she is, mother! (*As I-don't-care enters the
trees cover their faces. The Letters go off.*)

MALKAH (*who has followed him*).

My dear, darling Ask-a-Lot!

ASK-A-LOT

(*As though in a trance*).

I will be the Chazon. Boruch ato—

MALKAH.

Darling you are freezing. Oh my darling!

ASK-A-LOT.

Why don't you let me stand by myself? I am saying my prayers for them, for the trees of Palestine. Birdie, won't let me send my purse, so I am praying. (*She calls off stage.*) Oh, letters isn't it true?

MALKAH (*alarmed*).

My darling, what is the matter with you?

I-DON'T-CARE (*revengefully*).

She's got a cold. I told you you'd catch cold!

ASK-A-LOT (*persistently*).

No, I am the Chazon and I heard the birdies and trees talk. I know everything that happened to your brothers and sisters far away, and the Letters helped me!

I-DON'T-CARE (*quickly*).

I don't believe you! You're a girl!

ASK-A-LOT (*pitifully*).

Mamma, I am telling the truth, don't you believe me? (*The trees are chanting.*) The trees are chanting, don't you hear them?

MALKAH.

My dear, you are imagining. Come along.

ASK-A-LOT.

You don't believe me?

(*She has walked up stage with her mother. Suddenly she rushes to the footlights and turns to the audience.*)

ASK-A-LOT.

Is there no one who believes me? Don't you believe me? All right mother, take me home quick. I will tell all the girls what I heard and we will send to our little Jewish brothers and sisters in Palestine, our seeds and our sunshine and our kisses and our purses and everything to help. And someday they will send us a white bird for a messenger and—isn't that so, mother?

(*She goes with her mother and I-don'tCare as the wind whistles through the "trees."*)

Darkness—Change of Scene.

SCENE VIII.

“IN FRONT OF THE GATES OF ALEPH
BES LAND.”

CHARACTERS:

REBBI.

ASK-A-LOT.

MALKAH.

I-DON'T-CARE.

ALL THE LETTERS.

(All the Letters in place against the wall. The Rabbi stands in front of the center Gate playing the last strains of “Has Hashemesh”. Malkah, I-don’t-care and Ask-a-Lot come in from the Help Street Gate, as though just emerging from the last scene—In the Woods.)

ASK-A-LOT

(As if just ending the previous speech).

—and our seeds and our sunshine and our kisses
and our purses and everything to help!

MALKAH.

Then I must go back to my home to my own
street, to tell all the children.

I-DON'T-CARE.

No! No! I want to stay here. I love it more
than all the rest of the world. I *do care* for Aleph
Bes Land. Jewish boys here can love and not be
babies, either.

ASK-A-LOT.

I want to be a Jewish child forever. Please don't

change me back. When I am a doll, I can't be happy, and I can't love, and I can't help, but I must always stay stiff on a chair. Isn't it better to be a Jewish child?

ALL THE LETTERS

(rush up to the Rebbi).

"Rebbi!" "Rebbi!" "Let me go!" "Me!"
"Me!" "I will go!"

YODH.

O Rebbi, it is so hard to stay printed in a book. Let us go along—and be like real children.

ALL.

"Please!" "Please!" "Rebbi, let us go!"

REBBI *(sternly)*.

I am sorry. Remember you must yet be punished for trying to upset Aleph Bes Land.

(The Letters step back in fear.)

So this is your punishment. You must stay here forever—until another Jewish child comes to take you with her.

(They fall back in their places, sadly.)

MALKAH *(warmly)*.

Take me back to my home Rebbi! I want to tell all the children what I have seen.

I-DON'T-CARE AND ASK-A-LOT.

No! No!

REBBI *(to the Dolls)*.

You must return quickly, for soon the morning

A 359904

will come, and Malkah will wake and you must go away from this Land. (*Looks up to a corner off stage.*) There is the Red Magic Boat waiting in the air. It is ashamed because it tumbled you all out before. Come back, Red Ark. I forgive you. Take back the children. (*Pause.*) The Book is bashful.

Aleph, Bes, Toph, Shin.

Hurry!

(*They come out of the Gates and stand before the Rebbi.*)

Bring my Red Book in!

Aleph, Toph, Shin, Bes,

Bring my Book right to this place.

Soldiers, through the wide world look,

Aleph, Bes, bring my Book!

(*Aleph, Bes, Shin, Toph re-enter, pulling and pushing the Book as though it were unwilling to enter.*)

REBBI

(*As Malkah "enters" the Ark.*)

Good-bye Malkah, little ones, good-bye. Will you remember Happy Street, and Love Street and Help Street, and all that you saw and heard?

ASK-A-LOT

(*Reluctantly entering Ark, led by Malkah.*)

Always!

I-DON'T-CARE.

That's all I care about!

MALKAH.

If I tell my friends about you, will you come for them too?

REBBI.

If they wait for me, perhaps I will come to them too with my Great Red Magic Boat and bring them here. I will show all your friends the true Wonderland of Jewish children. Good-bye, Malkah. I must stay with my soldiers till the moon goes out of the sky. Aleph, Bes, Toph, Shin will guard you. Farewell!

ALL THREE.

Good-bye Rebbi!

(Here the Soldiers Gimel to Resh, all those seen at the opening of Scene II, troop out quietly in front of the Three Gates and form lines against the wall. The Rebbi is in the center.

The Soldier Letters begin their song "Hush! Hush! etc.," as sung in the beginning of Scene II.

The Ark passes by one gate after another slowly, and the singing soldiers wave to them and follow them with their eyes.)

ALL THREE

(As they pass each gate slowly, inside the Great Red Book).

Good-bye, Happy Street! Good-bye- Help Street!
Good-bye, Love Street!

(The Ark slowly passes off. The singing and the lights die down and the final tableaux shows the Soldier Letters standing rigid against the wall like a "Line", with the Captain and his fiddle in the center of the stage and the Ark disappearing.)

MALKAH'S VOICE

(Off stage as the Ark goes off).

Rebbi, Rebbi, I'll never forget. I'll never forget,
Rebbi!

Darkness—Change of Scene.

SCENE IX.

"THE HOME OF MALKAH."

(Same as Scene One. In front of the curtains in Malkah's home. When the lights are turned up, Malkah is discovered sleeping where she closed her eyes in Scene I. The curtains are closed.)

MALKAH

(muttering in her sleep).

Rebbi, Rebbi! I'll never forget! I'll never forget, Rebbi!

(Then she awakes. Pantomime of awakening, surprise, pinching herself, looking about dazed, etc.)
I-don't-care! They're true!

(Rushes excitedly, opens curtain and there on the chair are her two dolls—merely dolls just as they were at the very opening of Scene I. She is stunned with disappointment.)

MALKAH.

O, I do so wish you were real! It was only a dream! *(Vaguely.)* The Rebbi? Happy Street? Love Street? Help Street? The Land of the Aleph Bes?

(Looks at the audience. Brightly.)

But you are real, aren't you? And the Rebbi said if I ever get real Jewish Children to promise, I can take them long, and he will show us the real Jewish Wonderland—and we will live happily ever after!

THE END.

NOTE.

The publisher of this play can furnish the photographs of the players and of the settings of the play; music for the songs; special copies of individual players' parts; directions for stage setting, lighting and complete plans for staging; costume designs for all characters, etc.

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